

ABSTRACT

THESIS: Healthy Meals, Healthy Families: A Pilot Intervention to Improve Nutrition Knowledge and Self-Efficacy to Prepare Healthy Meals Among Low-Income Individuals in Delaware County, Indiana

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Food is a fundamental necessity of life. However, millions of Americans do not have access to adequate food and are considered to be "food insecure." Research has shown that low-income individuals have limited food preparation skills and low levels of self-efficacy to prepare healthy meals, further complicating their food situations. The purpose of this pilot study was to determine the effectiveness of a community cooking demonstration at increasing self-efficacy to prepare healthy meals with limited resources. Twenty-three low-income adults participated in the intervention and completed a pre- and post-test assessment to measure changes in self-efficacy to cook, as well as changes in general food and nutrition knowledge. Results indicated that although there were no significant improvements in participants' self-efficacy to prepare healthy meals (39.3 ± 11.3 vs. 44.5 ± 9.1 ; $t=1.76$, $p=0.25$), subjects did experience significant gains in knowledge related to the MyPlate food guide (1.2 ± 0.5 vs. 1.8 ± 0.8 ; $t=2.82$, $p=0.01$) and basic food safety (0.7 ± 0.9 vs. 2.5 ± 1.0 ; $t=6.05$, $p<0.001$). Increased knowledge is a critical building block toward behavior change and increased self-efficacy.